

MAY HEALTH TIP

This month we are going to learn about blood pressure since May is National High Blood Pressure Education Month. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 1 of 3 American adults has high blood pressure (also called hypertension). Among minorities, high blood pressure affects about 2 in 5 African Americans, 1 in 5 Hispanics and Native Americans, and 1 in 6 Asians.

High blood pressure is sometimes called the ‘silent killer’ because it usually has no noticeable warning signs or symptoms until other serious problems arise; therefore, many people do not know that they have it. High blood pressure increases one’s chance for developing heart disease and stroke, and all persons, including children, can develop high blood pressure. Because the consequences associated with this condition are so serious, early detection, treatment, and control are important.

The good news is that high blood pressure is easily detectable and usually controllable with lifestyle modifications. According to the American Heart Association, clinical trials have shown that by lowering blood pressure to acceptable levels the incidence of:

- Stroke can be reduced by an average of 35–40 percent.
- Heart attack can be reduced by an average of 20–25 percent and
- Heart failure can be reduced by an average of more than 50 percent.

The following are a few suggestions for keeping your blood pressure in a healthy range:

- 1- Get checked -- Your doctor or other qualified health professional should check your blood pressure at least once every two years, or more often if necessary.
- 2- Know your numbers -- Normal blood pressure is a systolic blood pressure less than 120 (this is the top number which represents the pressure while the heart is beating) and a diastolic blood pressure less than 80 (this is the bottom number and represents the pressure when the heart is resting between beats).
- 3- Maintain a Healthy Weight -- Being overweight or obese can raise your blood pressure. Losing weight will reduce the strain on your heart, and can often cause your blood pressure to drop. Measuring Body Mass Index (or

BMI) is one way to estimate body fat in adults; it is based on one's height and weight.

- 4- Be Active -- Physical activity can help to lower blood pressure. The Surgeon General recommends that adults engage in moderate-level physical activities (such as brisk walking) for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week.
- 5- Eat a Healthy Diet -- This includes eating lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, reducing your intake of saturated fats and cholesterol and lowering or cutting out salt. Be aware that processed foods can be high in salt and avoid adding salt in cooking or at the table. Research has found that the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan has been found to significantly lower blood pressure.
- 6- Drink Alcohol in Moderation -- Excessive alcohol consumption is related to increased blood pressure. Limit your alcohol consumption to no more than 1–2 drinks a day. If you're on a weight-reduction diet, remember that alcohol is high in calories.
- 7- Stop Smoking -- Smoking injures blood vessels and speeds up the process of hardening of the arteries. Quitting smoking lowers one's risk of heart attack and stroke.

The “Health Information & Resources” page of the Health Department’s website offers information to help you implement these changes. Among these resources are links to a BMI calculator and the DASH eating plan.

Resources

“Blood pressure.” American Heart Association,
<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4473>

“Control your risk factors.” American Heart Association,
<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=581>

“High blood pressure fact sheet.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), May 2006,
http://www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/library/fs_bloodpressure.htm

“High blood pressure.” CDC, February 2007, <http://www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure/>

“Preventing and controlling high blood pressure.” CDC, March 2007,
<http://www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure/prevention.htm>

“Why should I care?” American Heart Association,
<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=2129>